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## ***Positive Negatives - or the subtle arts of compromise***

Compromise: Middle English, mutual promise to abide by an arbiter's decision, from Anglo-French *compromisse*, from Latin *compromissum*, from neuter of *compromissus*, past participle of *compromittere* to promise mutually, from *com-* + *promittere* to promise... First Known Use: 15th century

intransitive verb

- 1        *a* : to come to agreement by mutual concession  
          *b* : to find or follow a way between extremes

1400–50; late Middle English < Anglo-French *compromisse*, Middle French *compromis* < Latin *compromissum* joint agreement < *compromittere* to enter into an agreement<sup>i</sup>

How slippery a term ‘collaboration’ is. Definitions aplenty tend to return to the notion of ‘working together’ (or ‘co-working’), and on this sort of basis we should be able to conclude that in all performance-making collaborations are vital because performance tends to involve the input of a wide range of practitioners, working together. Amongst these practitioners we can list stage, sound and lighting designers, stage manager and many others who work alongside both performers and – in general terms – a lead decision-maker. Does this model fit widespread understandings of the meaning of the terms collaboration or ‘Collaborative Theatre’<sup>ii</sup>? The lead decision-maker might be the stage director or choreographer, familiar to many performance-making traditions, or might equally be one key member of a performance collective – as is the case of the long-established and internationally-renowned UK company Forced Entertainment and key decision-maker Tim Etchells, and, in theory at least, the Théâtre du Soleil, Paris, and the central decision-making role of Ariane Mnouchkine.

However, few of the chapters included in this collection seem to be concerned with collaborations viewed from this default perspective. Instead, collaborative performance-making in many of these chapters seems to assume the status of a particular genre or mode of performance-making, that brings with it,

inseparable from it, its own celebrated histories; and uses of the term, in certain circles at least, seem to carry with them a number of abstractions – a certain aura, a particular ethos, a set of popular discourses, and even a warming sense of *commitment*. Central amongst those circles of use is Performing Arts or Performance Studies in the British university, where collaborative making in an undergraduate or postgraduate module might seem to achieve a useful degree of empirical fit with popular discourses concerned with political action and agency. In the undergraduate and postgraduate Performance Studies module – in my experience – collaborators set out, curiously enough, from the premise of equality of potential: that is, each student is understood at the outset to have as much to offer the project as each other – however much it turns out to be the case, eventually, that those with skill, experience and persuasive personalities take the lead in decision-making.

Amongst these positivities, however, I want to speak the word ‘collaboration’ again in order to sound a contrary note. Although many colleagues in the university might argue, and indeed some do argue in these pages, that there are no failures in collaborative performance-making in the university context – since all such practices offer participants a learning experience – I am more concerned, in this chapter, with large or little failures in collaborative working practices that take place in the expert or professional performance-making sphere. I am interested, in this case, in both collaborative practices between expert practitioners, and in how things *work* in the performance collective, which seems to me equally to involve the ‘working together’ with which I began, but to do so with fewer or different claims to parity between diverse practitioners.

I am arguing here that failure in the collaborative process in expert or professional performance-making is likely to put both or all practitioners involved at professional risk, and this is particularly but not exclusively so, where public funding and public reputation are involved. Professional co-working, in such circumstances, is likely to set out from a sense of artistic affinity, and professional falling out, as a consequence, tends to be particularly bitter, even if public failure is often avoided – because it must be – by one or the other participant stepping in to reassert her or his (‘signature’) control. In

even the best of cases, however, collaborations in *expert* performance-making tend to proceed through, and to end in compromise. By compromise, here, I understand ‘to come to [a professional creative] agreement by mutual concession’.

The issue of little or larger failures in expert or professional performance-making, and the matter of compromises, similarly minor or major, brings not only reputation but *affect* to the fore in the collaborative equation - where, in fact, it has always been, even if reference to its operations has, until relatively recently, been largely omitted from the dominant discourses of theoretical writing in Performance Studies. *Practitioner* affect in the making processes is undoubtedly hard for most researchers –let alone practitioners themselves - to capture, and harder still to write about, yet practitioner affect – sensing or feeling *something* – is likely to be key to her or his experience in the making<sup>iii</sup>. I have already used the words ‘at risk’ and ‘bitter’, above, suggesting, as I do so, that more is at stake, in collaborative practice between established practitioners, than the performance outcome. A practitioner’s name, and her signature (practices) are relatively fragile, as far as cultural capital is concerned, but so too are her or his feelings (professional as well as personal). In the always fraught world of arts funding, reputation tends to be a key token of exchange, hard won and easily lost. A professional choreographer working ‘collaboratively’ with a major theatre director may find that her or his input is subsumed under the signature of that director, late in the decision-making process, when the project is about to reach its audience.

In such circumstances might the choreographer’s input not be, properly speaking, *compromised*, or unable to function optimally? The highly reputed signature practitioner’s name so easily takes the place allotted to it by those who fund, write about and market professional performance in the wider arts communities. Hence the work will always be that of Ariane Mnouchkine, Robert Wilson or Tim Etchells, regardless of the importance of the input from choreographer, dancer, or expert performer (for example, Catherine Schaub, Lucinda Childs and Cathy Naden, amongst others). Plainly other artists understand the importance of the latter’s collaborative input – as they do

themselves – yet it would be foolish, on that basis, to make any claim as to parity of esteem for their input with the ‘signature’ practices and effects of the three theatre directors. Is the input of these other expert practitioners compromised, or ‘unable to function optimally’, as a consequence?

If my argument is valid here, then not simply do collaborations proceed through and end in compromise – even in the very best of cases – but they do so precisely because an established artist working collaboratively does so, explicitly or not, in order to open her work to difference, to give way to difference, to the end (or at least to the possibility) of what Brian Massumi has called ‘qualitative transformation’<sup>iv</sup>: in this case, what is entailed is a transformation in the practitioner’s experience of self under the gaze of the (respected) other. That other looks back – and this is vital – at the established artist, and ‘sees her’, and her or himself, differently. The relationship, as I have already indicated, is affectively charged, as well as professional. She sees the other seeing her, and it is on the basis of shared artistic affinity, as well as professional respect, that professional or expert collaborative practices engage with and *work through* this affective charge

This complex scenario may perhaps signal why the failure of a collaborative undertaking is likely either to be so damaging, or to force one practitioner to assume a fragile control in difficult circumstances. It is not necessary to have read a great deal of the work of French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan<sup>v</sup>, to recognize that the gaze of the (respected) other exposes the self, and is likely to interrogate her as well as reassure her. On these sorts of bases, I propose to identify such collaborative undertakings as *experimental in process* (if not necessarily in outcome); as such they are likely to be characterized by a particular intensity of *experience*, as each practitioner involved attempts to negotiate with her or his other – and, effectively, with her or his self – with a deadline in view and a reputation at stake. What follows, in time, is the further development of *expertise*.

The scenario I have outlined above, may however also hint at the reasons for undertaking these sorts of highly charged collaborative experiments: the expert practitioner learns through *the experience of* expert practice, whether it is

judged by others to be successful or less successful. Her *expertise* is not simply developed or elaborated ‘through practice’<sup>vi</sup>, but rather more importantly through the *experience of practices* (in the plural). She learns – and this is key – through difference, and she learns, as I suggest below, retrospectively, when some of the intensity of the collaborative or collective experience has lessened. Collaborative practices potentially enhance by energizing other, more established single-practitioner modes of practice, by bringing expert otherness into the making processes: on these bases the quality of the experience is likely to be intense, and that intensity may well not be lived as entirely positive in the short-term. Time, time present and time passing, in other words, is key to the development of experience and expertise.

I have suggested that expert collaborations tend to be experimental in process; that they are likely to involve a certain intensity of experience, and that it is this sort of intensity of experience, however difficult at the time, that is likely to develop expertise in a practitioner who might be more accustomed to make work alone (or in her or his own name). Although there has been much written about experimentation in performance in the 20thC, neither ‘experience’ nor ‘expertise’, for different reasons, has been widely theorized in the major discourses of Performance Studies in the university, as distinct, undoubtedly, from the disciplinary fields of Psychology, Sociology or Education, or the more recently emerged and interdisciplinary ‘practice theory’<sup>vii</sup> have suggested that all expert or professional collaborations are *experimental* in process – for the practitioners involved (this has little to do with what has been called ‘experimental theatre’ in the 20thC), and it is their contribution to *expert practitioners* in terms of *experience* that is vital.

Certainly such collaborations bring uncertainty into the equation, starting from the fact of artistic affinity: where expertise has been bound up with the ability to exercise a certain control upon process and outcome, collaborations require, as I indicate above, a certain agreement to loosen that control, and to admit difference into play. By compromise, in this case, I refer to a joint agreement and ‘mutual concession’ between practitioners, each of whom, in the event of collaboration, is likely to contribute differently to an end or ends unlikely to be

discernible in advance of the fact of working together. Surely this is the challenge of such an undertaking? Mutual concession seems to me to suppose a degree of letting go, indeed of loss, in both or all participants, in order to gain something more and other, but it also seems to me that there are few guarantees, in such a framework, that the collaborating practitioners will experience loss to the same degree and/or extent.

The notion of a 'promise to abide by an arbiter's decision' (above) is a delicate one, in the collaborative framework or the framework of collective creation, but it is one that I return to below with reference to both the (emergent) decisive role of one practitioner within the collaborative undertaking, and the role in creative invention played by disciplinary codes. Rather than a belief in a seemingly non-hierarchical mode of creative decision-making – which is undoubtedly useful in the undergraduate context where group devising is a widely adopted model of pedagogy – I have already identified *affinity* between artists, who are likely to work, in many instances of performance-making, in quite different artistic disciplines, as a basis for and means to working collaboratively. Artistic affinity is a curiously under-discussed notion, as far as academic writing about performance is concerned, yet it is a vital factor within the arts.

affinity c.1300, "relation by marriage" (as opposed to consanguinity), from O.Fr. lit. "bordering on," from ad- "to" (see ad-) + finis "a b order, an end" (see finish). Used figuratively since c.1600 of structural relationships in chemistry, philology, etc. Meaning "natural attraction"<sup>viii</sup>

Affinity can operate productively in the professional or expert sphere without the need for a pre-existing personal affinity. Mutual respect *for the other's work*, similarly under-theorized in academic writing<sup>ix</sup>, is likely to be a vital factor in expert collaborations. Working together, in the case of what I have called 'signature practitioners' – publicly recognized, named practitioners whose work and name are one – is particularly challenging because of the degree of 'mutual concession' to be negotiated.

Where expert performance-makers choose to collaborate, or to create collectively, in other words, they do so on the basis of some kind of perception of *professional or expert affinity and respect*, but in the light of an equally-strong perception of difference or heterogeneity viewed as likely to be productive. Such perceptions are often rapidly made, and there does tend to be a sense of recognition involved, likely to appear to be holistic rather than analytical, although it is also my sense that analysis of potential is likely already to have occurred elsewhere – hence Shobana Jeyasingh’s decision to collaborate with Michael Nyman, in making dance works that will bear her signature as choreographer<sup>x</sup>, is likely to have been informed by a pre-existing and very complex exercise, by Jeyasingh, of judgement of his compositions.

In such an instance, besides, Jeyasingh is likely to commission Nyman’s collaboration, with very clear implications as regard to signature and/or ‘ownership’ of what is made. I am supposing that from the outset, however, Jeyasingh cognizes a possibility of working productively with the composer, without knowing perhaps at that point in time how the composer himself works – his working in isolation, for example, whereas she works with others; the rhythm of his working, for example, in contrast with her own dance rehearsals with a group of highly-skilled dancers, develops, over what is sometimes an extended period of time. What this suggests, succinctly enough, is making-processes significantly at odds with each other within a professional collaboration: if they ‘co-labour’, it is largely at a safe distance from each other. What seems to me to be important to note about this sort of collaboration is that it brings together disciplinary difference – at least two complex knowledge sets, with their attendant and relative hierarchies – as well as different ways of seeing, knowing and working – and that it is likely that each participant will at certain key moments struggle to keep a sense that these two knowledge sets and ways of working, as well as the aesthetic preferences of each, will at some point – because they are both professionals – achieve a sense, however fragile and momentary, of empirical fit, the one with the other to the advantage of both.



My own sense nonetheless is that collaboration triggers a stronger rather than weaker sense of ownership in each participant, a stronger sense of disciplinary mastery, a stronger rather than a weaker sense of the rightness of a way of working. It can also trigger, as far as I have been able to discern, frustration, anger, anxiety, anticipation, despair, irritation, all of which seem to me to be normally a part of this sort of collaboration, and all of which seem to me to be 'containable', in the experience of it, only on the basis of a pre-existing and *expert* exercise of judgement as to the credibility of the other professional artist involved.

I want to direct your attention now to one particular instance of the history of collaborative or collective performance-making, as some of us experienced it in the 1960s and 1970s, and to draw on it in order to come back to one or two of the issues I have already identified. Rather than a collaborative company, the Théâtre du Soleil identified itself in terms of a '*société coopérative ouvrière de production*' – a cooperative workers' production group or corporation or collective. I have written 'so-called' because of a curiosity of English language reporting practised by the esteemed David Williams, whose *Théâtre du Soleil Sourcebook*, noted above, is entitled *Collaborative Theatre*, even though the term 'collaboration' figures twice only in his book's Index. The term preferred throughout by the practitioners themselves was and is 'collective'. This raises again the notion of the impact on the exercise of judgement of heterogeneous models of intelligibility. One of the two references to the collaborative, in William's book of that name, dates from 1975, when Mnouchkine declared that

Remember that the [theatre] director has already achieved the greatest degree of power he has ever had in history. And our aim is to move beyond that situation by creating a form of theatre where it will be possible for everyone to collaborate without there being directors, technicians, and so on, in the old sense.<sup>xi</sup>

Ironically, perhaps, Mnouchkine was already, in her own words in 1971, a director within the Théâtre du Soleil as collective, but her understanding of her role contrasts with her knowledge of the *metteur en scène* in the French

tradition, that she qualified as 'in the old sense'. In 1971 – that is three years after May 1968 – the theatre director to whom Mnouchkine alluded advisedly as 'he', had constructed himself as 'l'auteur de la scène' ('the author of the stage') whereas David William's way of seeing theatre directors, in 1999 from the UK, was not informed by the lived experience of that French peculiarity. William's genuine concern with collaborative practices, which I would argue he has retrospectively projected onto the Théâtre du Soleil's work for an English-language audience, needs to be positioned in the context of the British university's recourse, from the 1980s onwards, to group-devised performance-making as a highly economical way of undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and assessment, following upon the growth of performance as a very popular discipline in the university.

The French did have good reason in the 1960s and 1970s not to like the term 'collaboration', because of the still-ongoing accusation that many French had collaborated with occupying Germans during WWII. For me, however, the term 'collective' is interestingly different in implication from 'collaboration'. It can suppose that parts of the making might occur separately, or elsewhere, and be brought together, possibly with catalytic impact on the rest, possibly not – especially if the staging is identified as 'carnavalesque' – without nonetheless emerging from a collaborative 'working together'. What Williams has called collaborative, in the early significant work of the Théâtre du Soleil, was, in the making, cooperative and collective, as far as I have been able to discern, in that **1789**, at least, grew out of already-established practices of the group mastered for *Les Clowns*: these consisted of the perfecting of 'each person's individual creation', but in **1789** the co-creation was informed by each participant's shared knowledge of French myth – for example, the French revolution and its frustrated aspiration to liberty, equality and fraternity. (Mnouchkine refused in interview in 1970<sup>xii</sup> with Emile Copfermann to call preparation for *Les Clowns* 'collective creation', precisely because of its emphasis on collecting together individually-created and evaluated performance units.)

Preparatory work for 1789 was explicitly 'group work', but it made no claims, as far as I could see, to a dissolve of hierarchies in the exercise of judgement in creative decision-making. Mnouchkine, tellingly, did not perform in the work that has progressively associated itself with her signature, and as tellingly, when we see some of the images from the making<sup>xiii</sup> in the case of her *Tartuffe* (1995), the very fact that everyone else in the shots is in costume, while she is not, signals this division and this decision-making hierarchy: she is, as I have suggested above, in the rehearsal room and in this scene at least, the signature practitioner, the 'arbiter' to whom I refer, above, with whose decision-making all others present agree (*com-* + *promittere* – to promise mutually) to abide. Is this 'collaborative performance-making'?

Certainly it is a 'working together', and collectively, and it assumes, I would argue, as expert or professional collaborations in the arts communities tend to, that final creative decisions are likely to be taken by the (possibly emergent) decision-maker *within that group* – from which comes the notion that something is *com-promised*, by the collective, to the end of the work's emerging in a timely manner. That decision-maker, in a collective, may well not be the same single individual in each instance, since the work of the collective makes different demands in different times and places, but what seems to me to be clear is that detailed decision-making, before the work is made public, cannot be practised by the collective. The weight of judgement is openly assumed by a spokesperson/signature-marker, who may well be taken to represent the group of practitioners, but cannot usually represent the individual choices of all present. Whence compromise, that most delicate art.<sup>xiv</sup>

In the case of the work of the Théâtre du Soleil there was clear evidence from its establishment in the 1960s of a political persuasion and that sense of commitment referred to above, coupled with an open distaste for certain established institutions, but I can find no evidence of a collaborative ('equalising') ethos as others might identify it. The choice of carnival was explicit and principled: they chose to operate to multiple viewpoints, dispersed in the spaces and times of performance; yet even in the photographic

evidence, there are moments of sharp performance delineation, of what I would characterise as an 'older' judgement of a theatricality *that works*, that one might argue is necessitated precisely because of the performance-making expertise of each member of the collective, plus the aspiration, of each, to the multiple, to difference and dispersal within the one. Yet even in the 1960s, Mnouchkine's role as director within the collective is clear and acknowledged. I noted, above, that one understanding of 'compromise' from the Middle English, the notion of a 'mutual promise to abide by an arbiter's decision', might nonetheless refer less to a person, as arbiter, than to the discipline, to theatrical codes and conventions themselves. In the work of Théâtre du Soleil, I would argue that it is her understanding of theatricality itself that drives Mnouchkine's interventions. In the instance of Théâtre du Soleil, it is plainly also a theatricality that bears her signature, and it draws performers from around the world who want to work with her theatre collective. The compromise to which all eventually bend in the name of a particularly dazzling notion of theatricality - in the case of difficult rehearsal work for *Tartuffe*, to which we turn below - can be *mis*understood as something that Mnouchkine imposes, leaving the performer's own invention compromised.

In the collective's preparations for Molière's *Tartuffe*, a French cultural classic, the director's aesthetic signature remained absolutely clear and – I would argue - unrepentant. It is consistently Mnouchkine's signature – it can be identified in what I call her *signature practices*, which tend to work on every performance detail contributed/mediated by a performer arrived at within the work of the collective, that determines the detail as well as the larger lines of the performance aesthetic (and how the work is likely to be interpreted), and reinforces my hypothesis that this is an aesthetic/political practice that has developed consistently over thirty years, taking long-established members of the collective with it. In rehearsals for *Tartuffe*, as we see in the film *Au Soleil même la nuit*, by 'Éric Darmon et Catherine Vilpoux<sup>xv</sup> my hypothesis is that the intensity of individual experience for one particular member of the collective, developed painfully over time within the event of creative performance-making, demonstrably involves a powerful experience of the self as other. According to Milet's interpretation of Heidegger, to which I return

below, that experience, importantly, is likely to be grasped, retrospectively, as transformative, however painful it is in the throes of the intense experience itself.

In *Au Soleil même la nuit*, a filmed account of the preparations for the production of *Tartuffe*<sup>xvi</sup>, what we can see, in one particular segment, is an exercise of judgement that is individually voiced but collectively performed; it seems to be visited upon a single male actor by the collective, of which he is a privileged member. I would argue that his experience is overtly *transformative*, in the immediate circumstances, *for that performer* in terms of his ability to engage with the work of the group as a whole – indeed the production itself depended upon that development. In the longer term, it is likely that what was at stake was the development of his own expertise and artistry, and his ability to work productively with the other. What is staged in this extract from the film is a clash between the exercise of judgement of the director and the collective and the judgement of one performer, cast in one of the key performance roles (Valère) on the basis of his performance experience and growing expertise. In this short clip we see Mnouchkine in a state of what I take to be some distress<sup>xvii</sup>, before the assembled collective, because of rehearsal delays caused by the apparent inability of the actor concerned to work collectively (*'tout est pour l'autre'* – everything is done for the other, rather than individually, on the basis of his reflections of the night before. The film offers a privileged insight firstly into the drama of the development of expertise in the performer-to-collective relationship, and secondly into what some of the few twentieth century writers on experience have called the 'technicity of experience'<sup>xviii</sup>

The notion of the technicity of experience derives from a particular understanding of the self that supposes that the self is both plastic rather than fixed, and that it is performed by each of us. It follows that theatrical performance, drawing on the self of the actor in that context, might be grasped as a set of techniques that serve, symptomatically<sup>xix</sup>, to seem to expose that self either in the name of character or in the name of the performer concerned. In 'Experience as Technique of the Self' Jean-Philippe

Milet argues ‘that the very heterogeneity of experience is to be found in its technical dimension; that is, that there can be no experience without transformation, above all, without transformation of the self, and that there can be no transformation without technics’<sup>xx</sup>. The techniques of the self tend to be sharply exposed in performance-making contexts, not least where a performer – as in the case of *Tartuffe* – is cast to play a pre-established dramatic character. The technicity of characterization, in performance involves the actor’s explicit access to and choices made from sets of physical symptoms, identifiable as such, that the expert performer [her](#) or himself can thematize: that is, he or she is able to work explicitly with a set of physical options, trying them out, testing and discussing, with those involved, what works and what works less well, and why. These physical choices, plainly, can equally be understood as symptoms of or pointers to notions of the interiority of self (of dramatic character, as well as the actor’s self<sup>xxi</sup>). The work of the collective that is Théâtre du Soleil is highly technical, explicitly choreographed, and *Tartuffe* emerged in the context of what in the UK was called – curiously enough – ‘physical theatre’, highly choreographed and physically demanding, where performer choices demonstrate considerable physical plasticity and control. Actors working in the so-called ‘physical theatre’ are likely to be clear as to the sort of systems of options available, as well as their anticipated effect and affective potential.

In my experience over the years, some viewers of this particular clip tend to see the individuals involved – as though these *were individuals* and personalities experiencing difficulties – rather than the productive *work-based* clash between different ways of making performance, where that performance, finally, will be identifiable in terms of the signature of a master performance-maker and the collective within which she works. The individualisation of players in the collective tends to distract the onlooker from what are both heterogeneous work practices, for the individuals concerned, and collective practices specific to the company concerned. Working technically *for the other* (*tout est pour l’autre*) in terms of Mnouchkine’s expertise, is a matter, in the instance cited and in the dramatic context

concerned, of minutely detailed gestuality and movement, dependent always on responses to tiny triggers emitted by the other performer.

Many of us speak about qualitative transformation in performance-making, but we tend to be reticent as to the practices themselves that are capable of bringing creative transformation about, as a stage in the acquisition of expertise. Plainly a key difficulty for writers is that transformation in performance-making expertise can only be *practised* in a relational framework – that is, in the active presence of an other, who brings difference, as I point out above, into the equation. Within that relational framework, as the video clip makes fully clear, the actor concerned appears to be unable to grasp the need to work technically, in the first instance, *with the other*, that is, in live interaction with the finely articulated performance techniques of the long-established company member (Juliana Carneiro da Cunha, seen below, standing) that seem to be alien to him. The approach of Martial Jacques (seen below in rehearsal, fig.2) was intellectualizing, and he argued that he worked out what to do in the course of thinking it through the previous evening.



**Fig 1 Juliana Carneiro da Cunha**



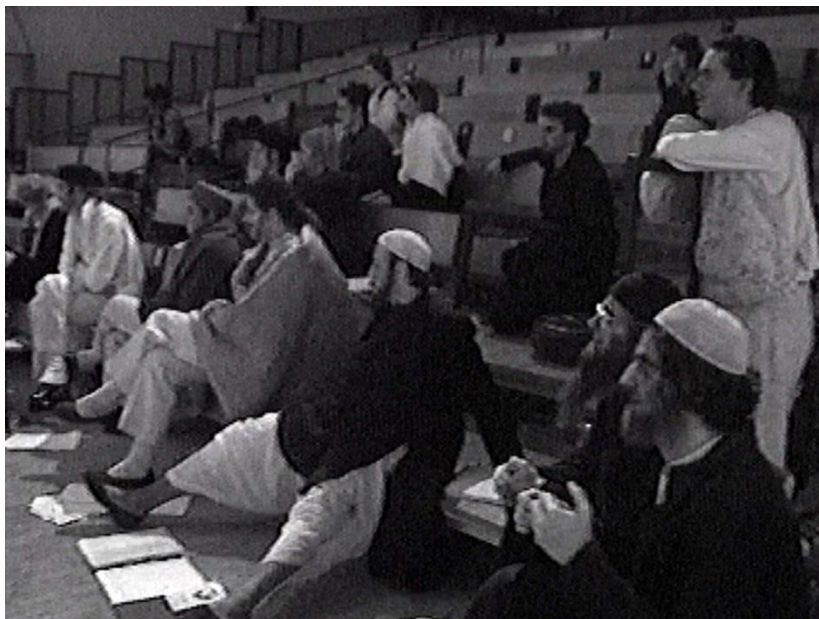
**Fig 2 Martial Jacques**

Milet paraphrases from Heidegger's writing on technicity, arguing that transformation of the self is arrived at *retrospectively* through a 'becoming other' of the self<sup>xxii</sup>. When we transpose Milet's heideggerian observations to this example of a quasi-public event presented to the gaze of the largely sympathetic other (the theatre collective assembled as audience – see figs 3 and 4), what needs to be understood is that the theatre worker concerned must *endure that experience*. In Milet's terms, he receives it as it strikes him, and he submits to it, with some very evident difficulty, not because the director in the collective imposes it upon him – this is to give way to myths of the tyrannical director - but because the collective judgement is engaged, and because he has committed to that collective. Is his own inventive work compromised, or 'unable to function optimally', as we saw above?





**Fig 3 Cast members of the collective serving as audience**



**Fig 4 Members of the collective serving as audience at rehearsals**

I prefer to argue, instead, that what can eventually be seen in this clip is one aspect of the evidently painful experience that will lead, progressively, to a qualitative transformation, following intensive interactive and detailed work with the highly expert, long-time member of the collective. He will become other to his (former sense of) self and therefore differently himself, through close confrontation with difference. We might argue the same, in the case of Mnouchkine, who – and this is rare enough – is later interviewed, alone in the

shot, on the difficulties that beset her here, and the actions she felt obliged to take. It is plainly never too late, in the case of a major creative practitioner, to undergo a challenge to and a readjustment of the self.



**Fig 5 Ariane Mnouchkine addresses the question of rehearsal delays and her intervention**

'Constitutive of identity', Milet adds, 'this alteration is not [immediately] absorbed within identity', as we might expect of a short-term learning experience. Instead, alteration, experienced in – for example - productive collaborations, 'opens [the identity of the self] up in a double sense'. Alterity or difference, in these instances, 'both articulates and directs [identity], and [it] divides and splits it. As I suggested above, this is precisely, to my mind, why expert practitioners agree and – in some cases - go on agreeing to collaborate.

Thus any significant development in expertise and hence in practitioner identity as a working member of Théâtre du Soleil 'is attained... as [an] event, [a] singularity', and 'it is always [acquired] retrospectively'. Collective creation, and/or collaboration, in this sense – and I realize that this view may not be popular – can do something of a violence to the self who commits ('compromisse'; 'comprōmittere'; 'to find or follow a way between extremes') to it: the expert practitioner, open to develop through qualitative transformation and

keen to work collaboratively, agrees in advance to this, endures it, before grasping its significance retrospectively.

Now, transformative experience of the self, within the collective (or social group, or group of collaborators) might well – curiously enough – be seen as straightforwardly positive and quickly perceived by the performer concerned. Curiously, because an individual's sense of self, ways of thinking, seeing, saying and doing, attitude and sense of the possible, tend, as far as I have been able to discern, to be impressed *gradually* over time, internalized, as well as externalized in actions taken, and many of us tend, as far as I can tell, to suppose that our own 'sense of self'-entailing techniques of the self, modes of action in the everyday, that we consistently practise - is more or less stabilized and embedded. The ways we understand self in the everyday could be argued to constitute a major model of intelligibility, a way of understanding self and world that actually also contributes to both self and world. In this sort of understanding, a 'learning experience' might seem to be readily assumed, a positivity, that is effectively added to that already stabilized, carefully constituted self. The self expands. Yet the sort of qualitative transformation I have identified here, that is hard won, likely to disrupt and even to rupture the established sense of self and others, is likely, in Milet's reading of Heidegger, to be perceived retrospectively. It is likely to be experienced, in the acutely intense events of collective making that we see in *Au Soleil même la nuit*, as publicly wounding; yet I am arguing that it is precisely through this intense engagement with the other that the practitioner acquires some of the ingredients of an expertise that he or she does not *necessarily* recognise at the time. In performance-making, as it develops in the individual practitioner, through one or another instance of collaboration, it is experienced at best, in the event of it, as experimentation – 'gained by repeated trials', 'tested', 'felt and undergone'<sup>xxiii</sup>.

A withdrawal from a collaboration which 'is not working', at any point in the proceedings, might entail, for one or more party to the project in hand, 'an endangering of reputation', an 'exposure to danger or suspicion', both of which

are likely to have ongoing implications for the way each performance-maker involved views her or his own situation. One tends in the first instance to say 'That [woman/man/individual](#) is impossible!', rather than, quietly to oneself, 'Am I impossible?'. Such an exposure or endangering rankles, and goes on rankling, and my suggestion in this chapter is that one of the reasons for elation, when a collaboration finally '*works*', is precisely because of a sense of relief coupled with a sense of expansion: expert collaborations tend to work, for one and another practitioner, by fracturing the established sense of self, to admit an otherness that challenges, for those artists for whom a challenge is desired. The elation seems to me to be relatively short-lived, and it is retrospectively, at some length, that the collaborator grasps the changes to the self that constitute an acquiring of expertise.

I have suggested, above, that working together (or collaboration), even between expert or professional practitioners, tends, where those practitioners operate within a similar discipline – such as theatre-making and performance – to be characterized by differences in skill, experience and potential, necessitating ongoing negotiation and what might be merely an interim arrival at compromise. Performer expertise is both a curious phenomenon and an undertheorized field in the UK context. Training institutions differ in approach and the working individual tends to acquire expertise progressively through the shared experience of expert practices. For the less skilled with less experience of 'working together', whether in a formal collaboration or in collective performance-making, a 'successful outcome' will almost certainly constitute a training through practice, an elaboration of her or his own potential, yet I have also argued above that that experience of enhancement is likely to be painful *in the event*, if it is to be transformative after it. I am interested in how we might theorize that kind of learning through experience which is both bruising and potentially transformative of the self of the practitioner.

Does the dominant engagement of the one mean that her other is necessarily dominated, within collective or collaborative practices? I am supposing that the matter is less straightforward than such an oppositional model would suggest, and that 'the same' complex, collective or collaborative undertaking is likely to

be differently experienced by each practitioner, both at the time and after it. What ensues is likely to be experienced as ‘not [wholly] of our own making’. To undergo it would ‘mean [in part to...] submit to it’. What *can go wrong* in expert collaborative practices with a first night in view is likely to go wrong, and on this basis many of our ensuing actions will constitute *ways of coping*. These ways of coping are characteristic, in my view, of a mastery in collaborative or collective performance-making whose implications are likely to be grasped at length, as I suggest above, rather than ‘in the moment’.

Experience gained in collaborative or collective practice, from this perspective, ‘transforms in the sense that it acquires form at the end of a crossing, of a trial of endurance, *après coup*’<sup>xxiv</sup>. For the ‘co-labouring’ practitioner, then, *becoming other* – a stage involved, I would argue, in acquiring mastery – ‘is to become self’. ‘One can only become [oneself, as an expert practitioner], through becoming other (*en s’altérant*), through alteration’. This fracturing of the self, that I am arguing is constitutive of the elaboration of (expert) identity in the collaborative practitioner, is not immediately absorbed but opens identity up, in both articulating and directing it, dividing it and splitting it. To return to the definitions of compromise, then, with which I began, compromise in expert collaborative or collective making practices can entail a settlement of differences by mutual adjustment or modification of opposing claims, principles, demands; an agreement by mutual concession; but also – as we see in the film of the making of *Tartuffe* – a potential endangering, especially of reputation; an exposure to danger or suspicion, when what the performer undertakes is viewed critically, in the instant, by all other members of the collective.

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### Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> I quote here and in viii below from a number of online etymological dictionaries, including [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com); [www.etymonline.com/index.php](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php); [www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary);

<sup>ii</sup> The title of David Williams’ *Théâtre du Soleil Sourcebook*, London & New York: Routledge, 1999.

<sup>iii</sup> Brian Massumi writes explicitly about affect, in his *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (2002), where he notes, in spinozan terms, that affect ‘is synesthetic, implying a participation of the senses in each other: the measure of a living thing’s potential interactions is

its ability to transform the effects of one sensory mode into those of another' (p.35). See also M. Gregg and G. Seigworth's *The Affect Theory Reader*, Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2010. The play of affect is complex and shifting; it is likely to be experienced, by the practitioner, as singular.

<sup>iv</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2002.

<sup>v</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, trans. A. Sheridan, 1977, London: Vintage, 1998.

<sup>vi</sup> Charles Spinosa, 'Derridian dispersion and Heideggerian articulation: General tendencies in the practices that govern intelligibility', in Schatzki, Knorr Cetina and Von Savigny (eds), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, London: Routledge, 2001.

<sup>vii</sup> See, indicatively, K. A. Ericsson, N. Charness, P. J. Feltovich, R. Hoffman (eds), *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. On 'practice theory', see T. Schatzki, K. Knorr Cetina and E. Von Savigny (eds), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, London: Routledge, 2001.

<sup>viii</sup> See note i, above.

<sup>ix</sup> Michel de Certeau, in his "What we Do When we Believe", in M. Blonsky (ed), *On Signs*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985, seems to me to approach such questions but to date few published writers in Performance Studies have done so.

<sup>x</sup> The two collaborated on – amongst other pieces – *Configurations*, 1988 and 2012; *Strange Blooms*, 2013.

<sup>xi</sup> Ariane Mnouchkine, *L'Age d'Or: the long journey from 1793 to 1975*, *Theatre Quarterly* 5: 18, 1975.

<sup>xii</sup> Emile Copfermann, 'Entretiens avec Ariane Mnouchkine', *Travail théâtral*, 1976.

<sup>xiii</sup> Film *Au Soleil même la nuit*, AGAT Films & Cie, le Théâtre du Soleil, La Sept Arte,

<sup>xiv</sup> S. Bryant Bertail, in her 'Gender, Empire and Body Politic as Mise en Scène: Mnouchkine's "Les Atrides"', *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Mar., 1994), pp. 1-30 takes up this sort of issue. Relatively few English language texts approach the Mnouchkine phenomenon. Notable is A. Kiernander's *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Theatre du Soleil*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. In contrast, French language publications and articles abound, and many are included on the website <http://www.theatre-du-soleil.fr>.

<sup>xv</sup> © Agats Film & Cie, Théâtre du Soleil, La Sept ARTE – 1997. I have written elsewhere about this production and its peculiarities – see for example my "Constitutive Ambiguities", in J. Kelleher & N. Rideout (eds), *Contemporary Theatres in Europe*, London and New York: Routledge 2006. A critical companion, 2006

<sup>xvi</sup> A clip is available online at: <http://www.theatre-du-soleil.fr/thsol/notre-librairie/le-tartuffe,300/le-film-au-soleil-meme-la-nuit,800?lang=fr>

<sup>xvii</sup> I have written 'what I take to be...' because interpreting facial and vocal options, along with other bodywork options/actions, tends to entail recourse to what I have called 'major models of intelligibility'. These, in turn, relate to positioning, perspectives and points of view (eg practitioner perspectives and/versus spectator perspectives). Most of us use these interpretive models on a daily basis, to seem 'to read' others' facial and other modes of expression, in terms – generally – of what cannot be seen but must be sensed or intuited on the base of what can be seen or heard. What is at work here in semiotic terms is called symptomatics.

<sup>xviii</sup> The term "technicity" comes initially from Foucault's notion of what translators have called 'technologies of the self' (*technique de soi*), where the focus is quite particular to his enquiry into power (1992). The notion of 'technicity' relates more specifically to the ways technology operates in the human everyday ('arts of existence'), and in this sense, I would also identify a technicity specific to 'acting' or to 'dance' in the European and English traditions. More particularly in the terms of this chapter, a technicity of the self supposes ways of being and doing that tend to be patterned, consistent, and to a certain extent culturally shared. That they are shared, rather than singular, seems to me to be apparent in the ways we *can* interpret and indeed critique our own and others' ways of being and doing in the world.

<sup>xix</sup> Symptomatically, because the self, in many senses an abstraction, cannot be directly represented; instead, a performer materially articulates what she or he (and onlookers, if the work is effective) take to be indices of self. In this sense "self" is a model of intelligibility, that informs certain sorts of interpretation of material 'signs'. Interpretation of symptoms applies equally to performer and onlooker; sometimes there is disagreement.



<sup>xx</sup> J-P Milet 'Experience as Technique of the Self' in *Tekhnema 2 /Technics and Finitude/* Spring 1995, online at <http://tekhnama.free.fr/2Milet.htm>, consulted April 2013); see also M. Heidegger, "The Nature of Language" in *On the Way to Language*, trans. P.D. Hertz, Harper Collins, 1982.

<sup>xxi</sup> Various models of intelligibility apply here, and are exercised whenever we attribute imagination, thought and emotion – mainstream ways of interpreting material actions - to either character or to performer self.

<sup>xxii</sup> Milet ibid

<sup>xxiii</sup> Milet ibid

<sup>xxiv</sup> Milet ibid

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